



It's Monday, November 1, 2021. In today's issue: Enjoy our collections from home; Turkey Day in Holdrege; Historic buildings in Kearney; 100 years of Husker football radio; 1906 Benkelman fire; The Doors in Lincoln; Stories from *Nebraska History Magazine*; Events.

Search History Nebraska's collections with Preservica



We're moving our online collections to a new platform called Preservica. While we've had some online search capability before this, Preservica allows us to do so much more.

"It's hard to overstate what a big deal this is," says History Nebraska Director & CEO Trevor Jones. "Preservica will allow us to access, use, and trust digital information for decades to come. There are 640,000 files to search, and more are added daily."

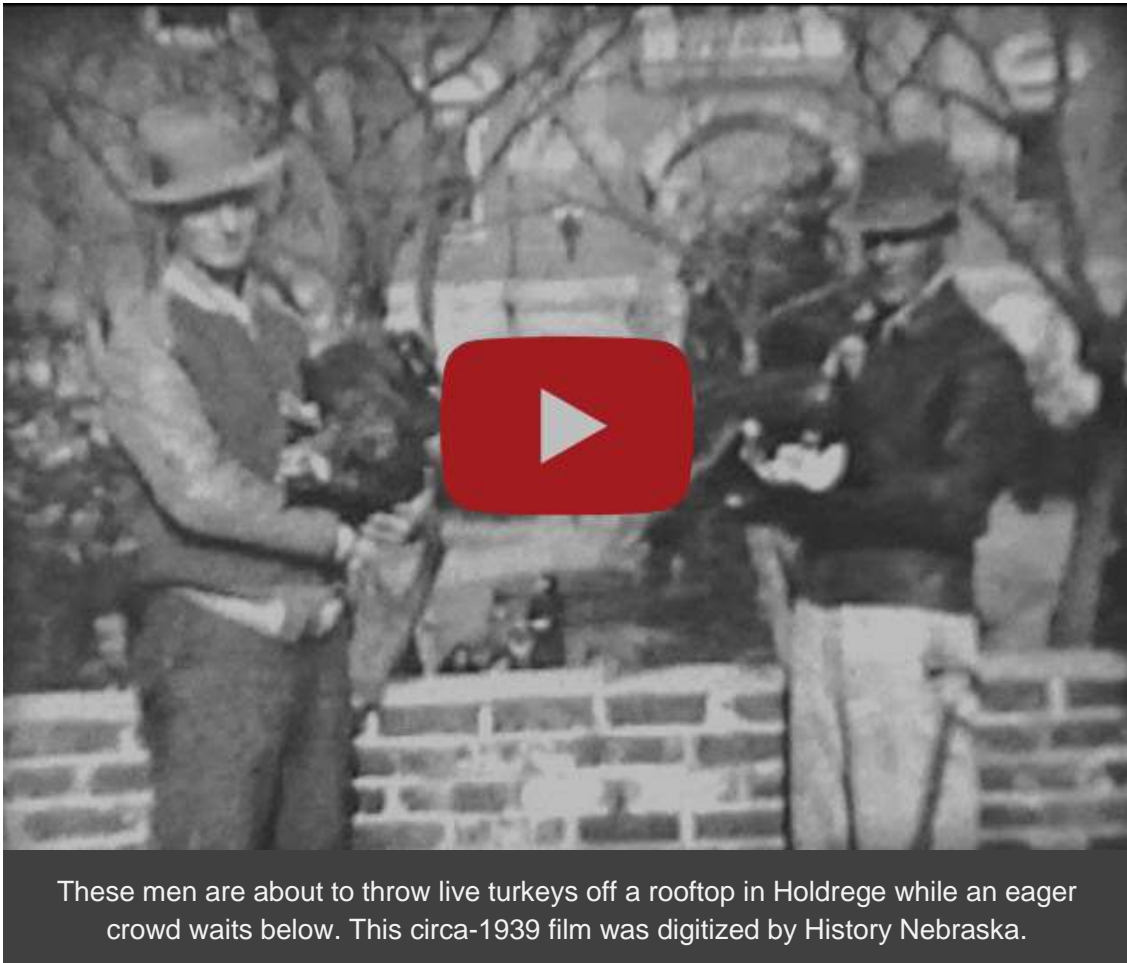
Filling 21 terabytes of server space, the growing collection includes photographs, government records, moving images, audio records, and library materials—all of which are now easy to view from home.

History Nebraska is an early adopter of Preservica's new "multi-part rendering page viewer." In plain language, this allows users to easily page through documents and multiple objects. ([Browse this 1915 illustrated travel diary to see what we mean.](#))

"Many capable hands worked on this project," Jones says, "but our Digital Archivist Lindsey Hillgartner saw the possibilities, made the plan, and managed the implementation. It would not have happened without her expertise and persistence. Thank you, Lindsey!"

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Turkey Day in Holdrege



“As God as my witness, I thought turkeys could fly!”

Readers of a certain age will remember a 1978 episode of the TV sitcom “WKRP in Cincinnati,” in which radio newsman Les Nessman narrates a Thanksgiving promotion gone awry. He describes live turkeys being thrown from a helicopter. *“Oh my God! They’re turkeys! ...Oh, the humanity! ...The turkeys are hitting the ground like sacks of wet cement!”*

Some say the TV episode was based on a 1973 event in Gettysburg, South Dakota, which involved live turkeys thrown from a Piper Cub.

But the idea of throwing live turkeys from high places is older still, as demonstrated by this Holdrege home movie filmed about 1939—when turkeys could still fly short distances. The local Turkey Day promotion had a simple

rule: any turkey you caught was yours to cook for Thanksgiving dinner. [Keep reading.](#)

Historic Tax Credits make a difference in Kearney



History Nebraska's State Historic Preservation Office manages Nebraska's Historic Tax Incentive Programs. Last month, NTV ran a story showing how the tax credit is helping restore buildings in downtown Kearney.

[Watch NTV's video and see more photos here.](#)

[Learn more about Historic Tax Incentive Programs](#) and how they can make a difference in your community.

100 years of Husker football on the radio

100 Years of Husker Football on the Radio

By David L. Bristow, History Nebraska

Long before Lyell Bremser first shouted “Man, woman, and child, did that put ‘em in the aisles!,” Pittsburgh radio station KDKA made Husker history on November 5, 1921, when it broadcast the Pitt-Nebraska football game. It was the first live broadcast of an NU football game, and one of the first football broadcasts ever.

Sixty-Three Yards!



Frank Capone and future College Football Hall of Fame inductee Capone (wearing the early Husker uniform) led the 1921 Nebraska-Pittsburgh game with a 53-yard run, scoring the first point, Nov. 5, 1921.

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Husker's home field circa 1920, before Memorial Stadium. The 1921 game was played at Forbes Field, the baseball park that was home to the Pittsburgh Pirates. History Nebraska 8/27/22 NHB

and one of the first football broadcasts ever.

Few Nebraskans had radios in 1921. The state's first commercial stations did not go on the air until the following year. And even if you had headphones and one of those newfangled battery-powered crystal sets, Nebraska was too far away to pick up the signal.

KDKA first went on the air in 1920. It was proud of being the “Finest Broadcasting Station of the World.” KDKA did the first live football broadcast during the Pitt-Nebraska game on October 8, 1921, less than a month before the Nebraska game.

Though Nebraskans could not hear the broadcast, they were pleased with the outcome. The Cornhuskers defeated Pitt 10-0.

Nebraska began its own radio broadcasts the following season. The first live broadcast from Nebraska Field (now known as Memorial Stadium) was NU's season opener, a 40-0 thrashing of South Dakota on October 7, 1922.

The university had its own radio station in the electrical engineering building. A telephone wire connected the station to a remote microphone inside the field. In 1924 the Daily Nebraskan learned that the station had a broadcast radius of 300 to 400 miles.

Commercial radio stations soon got involved. In 1925 the university partnered with the “Nebraska Radio Station” KXAS to broadcast games from a new soundproof booth in the (submerged) press box. For every game, KXAS “uses a telegraph wire” to relay the signal to its own studio.

By 1927, fans had grown accustomed to having an announcer explain the game as it unfolded. That season, Memorial Stadium added its first public address system and stadium announcer. Radio, however, was becoming controversial among athletic departments. In 1928 the Big Six Conference (the future Big 8, and predecessor of today's Big 12) discussed banning game broadcasts. Some athletic directors believed radio hurt attendance. Others thought it

helped by raising interest.

When a few athletic conferences banned broadcasts in 1932, Nebraska's “business manager of athletics” expressed support. As the Daily Nebraskan put it, “many people who would otherwise pay their \$2.75 to see the game now do not do so because they can save their money and enjoy the game almost as much at home.”

The Big Six banned broadcasts of conference games starting with the 1933 season. A letter to the Daily Nebraskan complained that “hundreds of thousands of true Nebraska grid fans are to be denied from their ‘Meat of Life.’” In 1935 a McCook state senator introduced a legislative bill requiring the university to accept the highest bid for game broadcasts. Warning of “considerable movement” on his part of the state, he argued that taxpayers supported the university and were therefore entitled to hear the games.

The university responded that the football program received no tax dollars and that football paid for much of

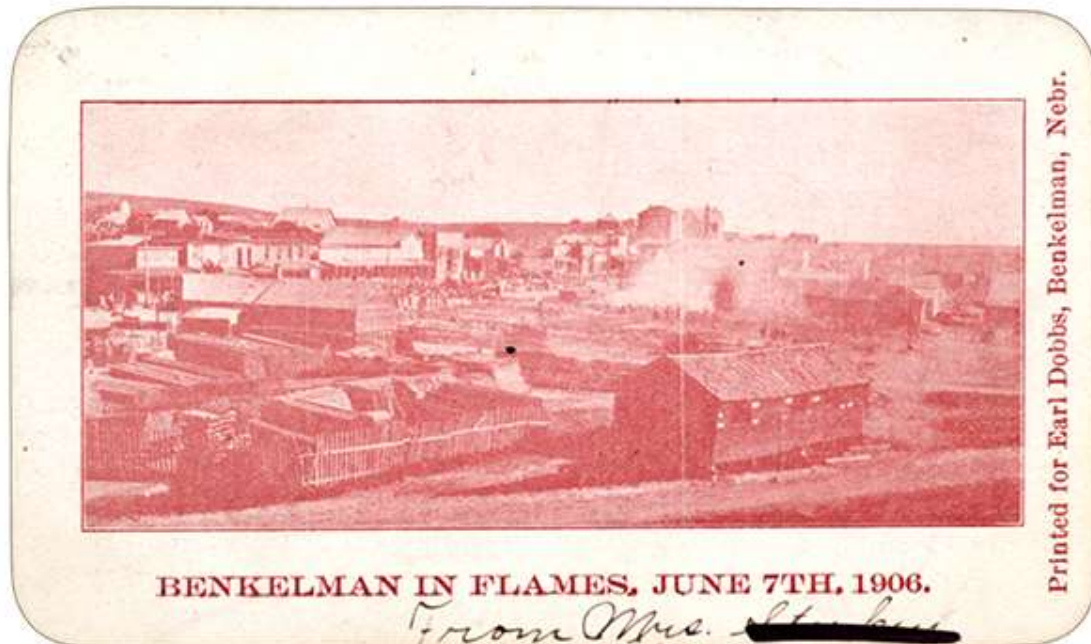
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Nebraska soon began broadcasting its own games before banning game broadcasts in the 1930s. Why did NU think that was a good idea? Read the full story in History Nebraska's column in [NEBRASKALand magazine's](#) November 2021 print issue. [A shorter version is on our blog.](#)

Fire(s) in Benkelman, 1906

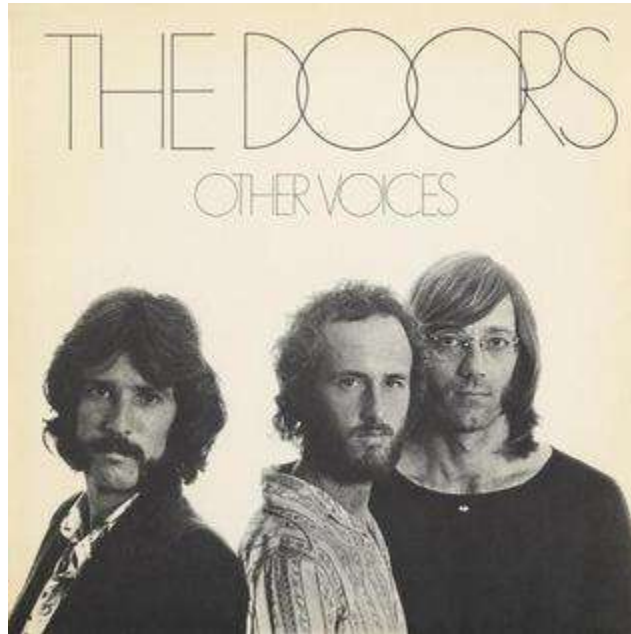


Wooden buildings, no building codes, and often no fire department to speak of. What could possibly go wrong? History Nebraska's collections are full of photos of disastrous fires from communities across the state.

On June 7, 1906, a livery barn caught fire in the southwest Nebraska town of Benkelman, killing fifteen horses and spreading to an entire city block, destroying a restaurant, shoe store, implement house, meat market, feed store, printing office, furniture store (though the furniture was saved), and a private residence.

By why did local resident Earl Dobbs have this postcard printed? [Keep reading.](#)

The Doors played their first post-Morrison show in Lincoln 50 years ago



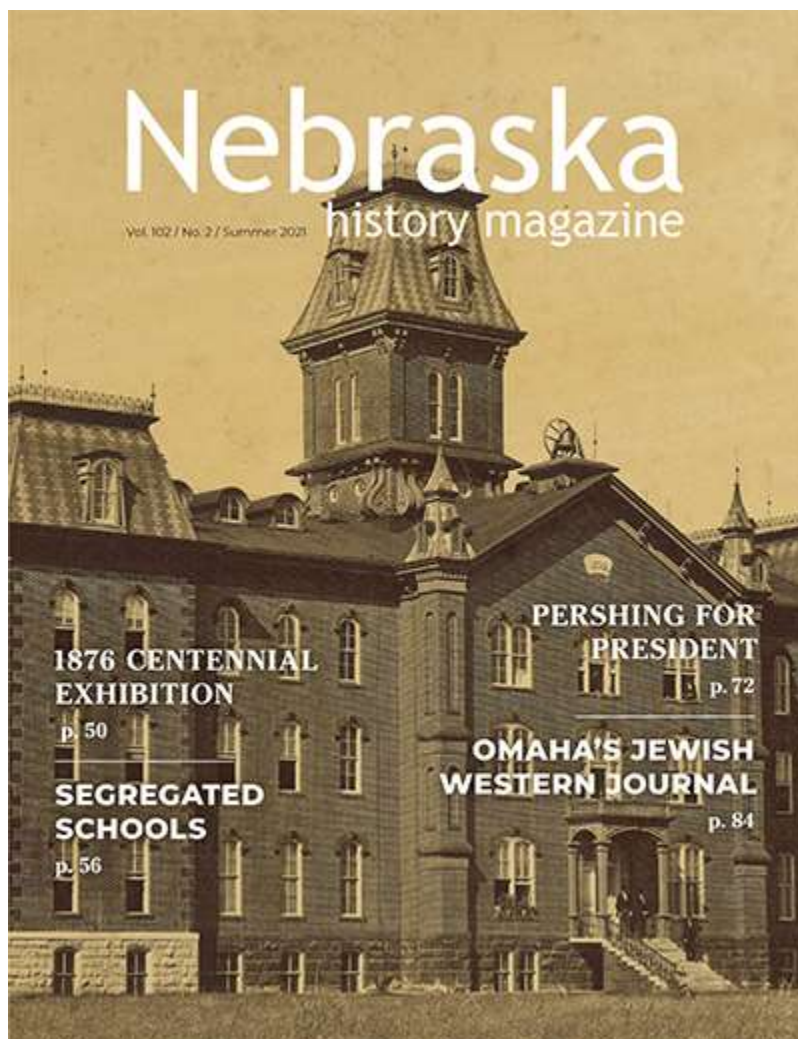
The legendary band The Doors tried to carry on after the death of lead singer Jim Morrison on July 3, 1971. They played their first post-Morrison concert on November 12 at Lincoln's Pershing Auditorium, touring in support of their new album, *Other Voices*. Rather than find a new lead singer, existing band members Ray Manzarek and Robby Krieger shared lead vocal duties.

"Keyboard man Ray Manzarek deserves the star for his dressing room for his performance on Friday evening at Pershing Auditorium," wrote Holly Spence for the *Lincoln Journal*. "He is super talented on both organ and piano. When he tears into the blues he really is a superstar."

Manzarek and Krieger were talented musicians, but neither had the vocal chops to replace Morrison's distinctive baritone. The new music received some radio airplay, but failed to break on through. The band was left like a dog

without a bone, an actor all alone. After a second album with the new lineup, The Doors broke up in 1973.

Stories from *Nebraska History Magazine's* Summer 2021 issue



Here are short versions of stories from the Summer 2021 issue of *Nebraska History Magazine*. You can read more, and see more photos, in the print edition. You can receive four issues of as part of a [History Nebraska membership](#).

- [This little-known photo](#) of the University of Nebraska's first building (detail shown above) was used to promote the state at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.
- Read the story of [Nebraska's first Jewish newspaper](#).
- Until World War I, every major US war had turned a general into a president. Gen. John Pershing based [his 1920 campaign in Nebraska](#).
- How an abolitionist priest [segregated Nebraska City's schools](#).

The Fall 2021 issue is also out, and the Winter issue will mail later this month. We'll tell you more about those in upcoming newsletters.

Upcoming Events



Nebraska Spirit Day is a family event; all ages are welcome and no registration is required. Activities include: design a new Nebraska flag; take a “shoe selfie” on our huge Nebraska map; go on a riddle scavenger hunt in our Unwrapped exhibit. [Keep reading](#).



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Turkey Day in Holdrege



By David L. Bristow, Editor

“As God as my witness, I thought turkeys could fly!”

Readers of a certain age will remember a 1978 episode of the TV sitcom “WKRP in Cincinnati,” in which radio newsman Les Nessman narrates a Thanksgiving promotion gone awry. He describes live turkeys being thrown from a helicopter. “Oh my God! They’re turkeys! ...Oh, the humanity! ...The turkeys are hitting the ground like sacks of wet cement!” ([Watch the WKRP clip here.](#))

The scene’s humor is based partly on its satire of radio announcer Herb Morrison’s famous 1937 live report of the *Hindenburg* airship disaster. But some say the turkey drop itself was based on real events. Various communities claim to be the inspiration. The strongest claim might be that of Gettysburg, South Dakota, where a 1973 Farmers Day celebration involved live turkeys being thrown from Piper Cub and landing, unexpectedly, “[like living battering rams.](#)”

But the idea of throwing live turkeys from high places is older still, as demonstrated by this [circa-1939 Holdrege home movie](#) digitized by History Nebraska. The local Turkey Day promotion had a simple rule: any turkey you caught was yours to cook for Thanksgiving dinner.

Three things have changed since then. One, even by the 1970s, poultry producers had learned to grow bigger, fatter birds. Two, such events assumed that the typical housewife knew how to pluck and gut a turkey before putting it in the oven. And three, promoters felt that the sight of terrified turkeys being chased and killed by a mob would be a popular and non-controversial public entertainment.

(Posted 3/1/2021)

First radio broadcast of a Husker football game,
Nov. 5, 1921



By David L. Bristow, Editor

Long before Lyell Bremser first shouted “Man, woman, and child, did that put ’em in the aisles!,” Pittsburgh radio station KDKA made Husker history on November 5, 1921, when it broadcast the Pitt-Nebraska football game. It was the first live broadcast of an NU football game, and one of the first football broadcasts ever.

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KDKA first went on the air in 1920; it still boasts of being the “Pioneer Broadcasting Station of the World.” KDKA did the first live football broadcast during the Pitt-West Virginia game on October 8, 1921, less than a month before the Nebraska game.

Though Nebraskans couldn’t hear the broadcast, they were pleased with the outcome. The Cornhuskers defeated Pop Warner’s squad 10-0. Lyell Bremser would have been happy, too, but he was only four years old at the time.

Photo, above: Team captain and future College Football Hall of Fame inductee Clarence Swanson scored the game’s only touchdown with a 63-yard run. Omaha World-Herald, Nov. 6, 1921.

Below: Nebraska’s home field circa 1920. The NU-Pitt game was played at Forbes Field, the baseball park that was home to the Pittsburgh Pirates. History Nebraska RG2758-105-8



You may also be interested in:

- **1920s Game Day: NU vs. Notre Dame.**
 - **In the 1930s the Huskers allowed only one radio broadcast per season.**
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(Posted 4/23/21)

Editorial assistant Breanna Fanta contributed research to this story.

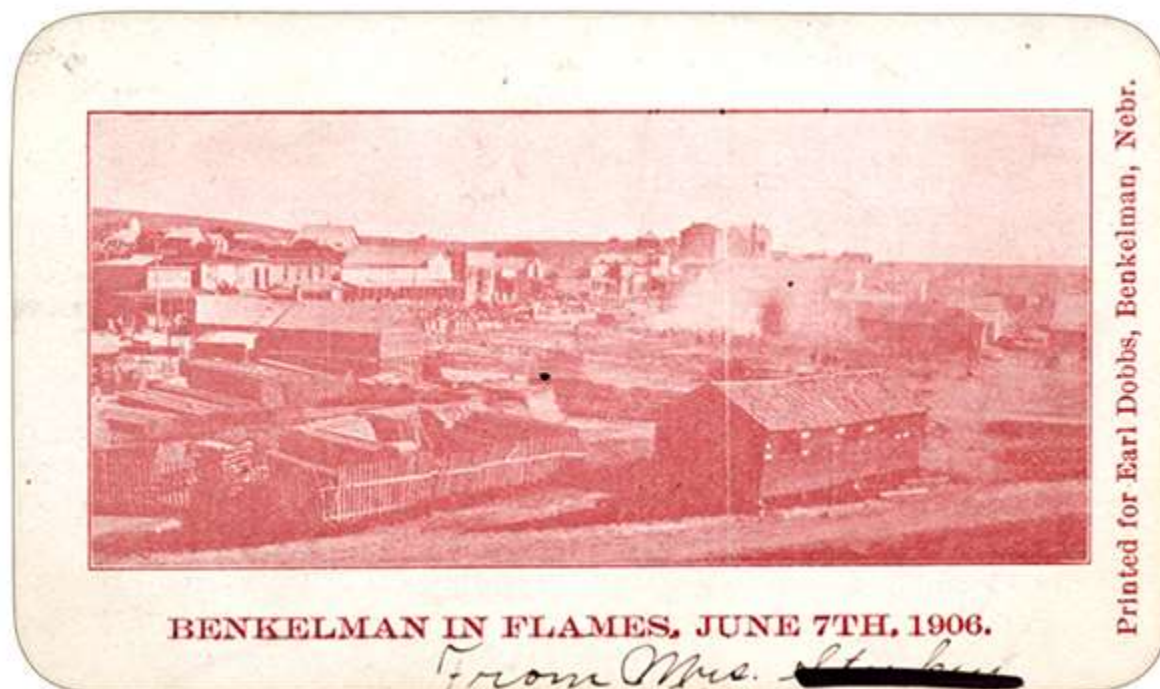
Sources:

“Nebraska-Pitt Contest of ’21 First on Radio,” *Lincoln Star*, Oct. 26, 1930.

“October 8, 1921: WVU vs. Pitt Marks First Live Football Radio Broadcast,” West Virginia Public Broadcasting, Oct. 8, 2019, <https://www.wvpublic.org/radio/2019-10-08/october-8-1921-wvu-vs-pitt-marks-first-live-football-radio-broadcast>

“R. Lyell Bremser (1917-1990),” https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/100877435/r_lyell-bremser

Fire(s) in Benkelman, 1906



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Wooden buildings, no building codes, and often no fire department to speak of. What could possibly go wrong? History Nebraska's collections are full of photos of disastrous fires from communities across the state.

On June 7, 1906, a livery barn caught fire in the southwest Nebraska town of Benkelman, killing fifteen horses and spreading to an entire city block, destroying a restaurant, shoe store, implement house, meat market, feed store, printing office, furniture store (though the furniture was saved), and a private residence.

Though it isn't known how the fire started, there was talk of a lawsuit against the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. "The manner in which every freight train throws sparks . . . is

almost sufficient evidence in itself that the fire was started by an engine,” the *Benkelman News-Chronicle* complained on June 22.

In the same issue, the *News-Chronicle* called for investment in “reliable fire protection” and a “good system of water works within reach of every house.” In its role as town booster, the paper extolled the community’s advantages and insisted that once rebuilt, “the fire district . . . will no doubt surpass any other in town from a point of beauty and quality.”

Such optimism may have been the point when Earl Dobbs, a local barber, ordered these cards to be printed. One doesn’t print souvenir cards for something that will be the death of the community, but rather for hardships that people might want to commemorate having survived and overcome.

Though his business wasn’t harmed by the 1906 fire, Dobbs wasn’t so fortunate on July 29, 1911, when fire swept another commercial block, including his barbershop. Starting in a restaurant, the fire caused about twice the damage of the earlier blaze. Only about half of the losses were insured, a surprisingly low figure in a town that had suffered a major fire just five years earlier. Dobbs was probably relieved that his \$100 in damages were covered, though to our knowledge he ordered no souvenir cards.

Photo: History Nebraska RG3907-1-3

(Posted 9/21/2021; an earlier version of this story first appeared in *Nebraska History Magazine*, Summer 2013, 108.)

Nebraska's 1876 Centennial Exhibition Photos

By Breanna Fanta, Editorial Assistant

In 1876 the United States held the Centennial International Exhibition in celebration of the centennial of its independence from Britain. Nebraska, the youngest state at the time, managed to fund and contribute an exhibit to the event. However for decades there was no photographic documentation of the exhibit. It wasn’t until a string of findings led to an image resurfacing.

Matthew G. Hansen, a Capitol Preservation Architect, shares his research journey in “Nebraska’s 1876 Centennial Exhibition Photos” in *Nebraska History Magazine*’s Summer 2021 issue.

In May of 2020, Hansen acquired a photograph labeled “University of Nebraska.” Captured was the University Hall: the first and, at the time, only building. It was one of many images produced by Virgil Homer Young for the Centennial Exhibition.



(Virgil H. Young's photograph of University Hall. Matthew G. Hansen)

In researching Young, Hansen found a report by the *Nebraska State Journal* in 1876 detailing the collection of images taken for the event. The description sounded similar to an albumen print he had purchased of the University Hall.

Hansen grew curious about the exhibition and was led to a *Nebraska History* article from 1976 covering Nebraska’s exhibit. It stated that “no sketch or photograph of the Nebraska exhibit at the Centennial Exhibition has been found.”

Come March of 2021, Hansen found and purchased a photograph of the exhibit from the Centennial Photographic Company (CPC). As the official photographer of the event, the CPC were the only ones licensed to take and sell images from the exhibition.



(The Centennial Photographic Company showing Nebraska's

exhibit in Philadelphia. Matthew G. Hansen)

The photo showed Nebraska's exhibit inside the Agricultural Hall and matched a thorough description provided in a *Grand Island Times* article from 1876.

Nebraska's exhibit was a large black walnut cabinet occupying 750 square feet. The glass cabinet fronts and open sacks presented grains, varying corn specimen, photographs of the university – like Young's – and books describing Nebraska. On top was a "large framed motto" with the words "State of Nebraska, Youngest and Best" written in gold and black lettering. In the middle of the sign was an illustration of the Nebraskan "coat of arms." A tower stood at each end presenting a variety of crop samples and other materials such as porcelain clay, peat, and wood pieces.

Hanging from the ceiling above was a large scarlet cloth banner that proudly read "Nebraska" sewn in bold white letters.

The entire article can be found in the Summer 2021 edition of the Nebraska History Magazine. Members receive four issues per year.

[Learn More](#)

Nebraska's First Jewish Newspaper

By Breanna Fanta, Editorial Assistant

“Newspapers are said to be the first draft of history.”

A short-lived twentieth century newspaper now provides insight into the politics and rivalries of Omaha’s early Jewish population. Oliver B. Pollak details the history of the paper and its founder in “William Castleman, Omaha and Chicago Printer, Activist, and Autodidact,” in *Nebraska History Magazine’s* Summer 2021 issue.

Throughout the 1890’s and early 1900’s, Jews fled their homes to escape persecution and poverty. From Hamburg and Southampton, ships delivered people to the East Coast where some traveled by train to areas such as Omaha, Nebraska.

Omaha’s Jewish community grew, providing a hospitable environment for immigrants.

William Castleman and his family were a part of that population. After arriving in Omaha, Castleman spent 1900 – 1906 working various printing jobs.

Born William Silverstein, William changed his last name to Castleman as a teenager. Many Jews at that time changed their names to avoid discrimination. William was also interested in politics, and may have changed his name in hopes of furthering his political ambitions.

Castleman aspired to lead and improve society. He was an active member in the Omaha Hebrew Club, the Hebrew Sick Benefit Society, and was an elected advisor to Woodmen of the World. He was also a part of Omaha’s Socialist Party group.



When Castleman met Nathan Yaffe—another young Jewish printer—his printing career truly began. The pair met through their social and professional circles. They were entrepreneurs and competitors. They formed a partnership in 1909 and began publishing a newspaper: the *Jewish Western Journal*, Nebraska’s first Jewish newspaper. Several advertisements were posted in other papers regarding the need for an “office girl,” “advertising man on paper,” and others. Another ad ran in the *Omaha Bee* in July of 1909 targeting political candidates about their “printing needs” by identifying a Jewish constituency: “We are prepared to translate the same into Hebrew language.”

The partnership between Castleman and Yaffe came to an end in 1915. No surviving copies of the *Jewish Western Journal* are known to exist. A second Jewish paper appeared in March 1916 under the editorship of Max Konecky. (Castleman was identified as the paper’s founder in a 1919 issue.) The *Jewish Bulletin* was a weekly paper that ran from March 1916 to April 1921. It was often critical of local Jewish leaders. The *Omaha Jewish Press*, which survives to this day, was “launched to run the abrasive *Jewish Bulletin* out of business,” Pollak writes.

Castleman had already left Omaha by then, moving to Chicago in 1918, where he became the editor and owner of *The Unionist*. He was a labor movement leader and advocate for senior citizens for the rest of his long life.

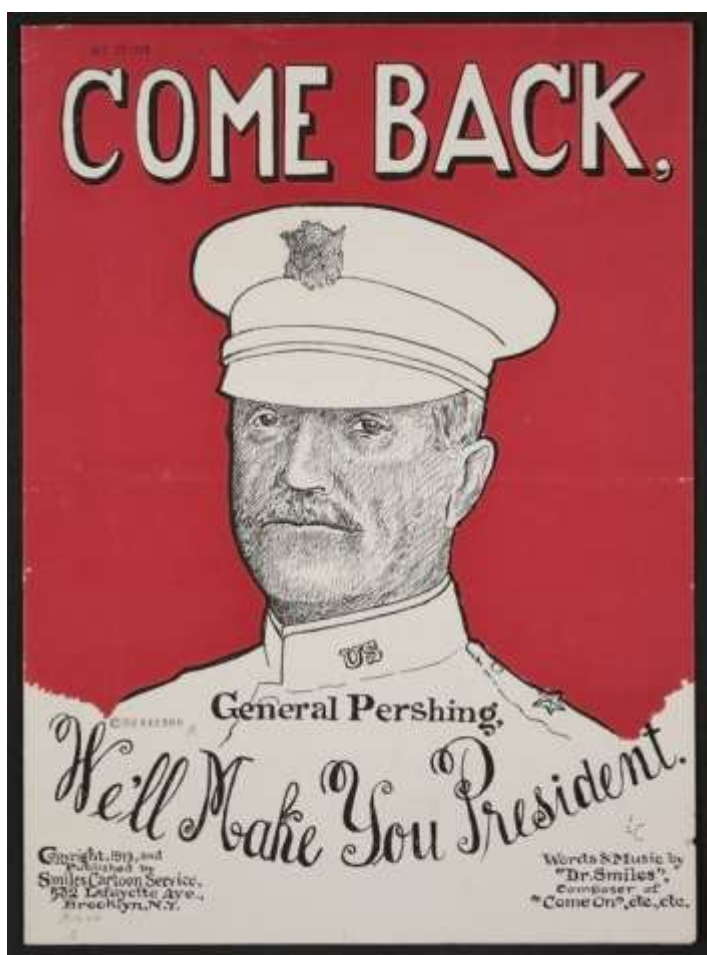
("Castleman and Yaffe were entrepreneurs, competitors, and--for a time--business partners.")

The entire article can be found in the Summer 2021 edition of the Nebraska History Magazine. Members receive four issues per year.

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Pershing for President

By Breanna Fanta, Editorial Assistant



As World War I came to a close, some political insiders counted on a longstanding US tradition—that each major war produced a general who became a president. As a commander of US forces, Gen. John J. Pershing was expected to be a major contender for the 1920 Republican presidential nomination. Instead, Pershing’s Nebraska-based campaign failed badly.

So where did he go wrong? In “Pershing Won’t Do: The Soldier Vote and the Election of 1920,” an article published in the *Nebraska History Magazine*’s Summer 2021 issue, Bradley M. Galka looks at soldiers’ attitudes as a probable cause for Pershing’s lack of popularity among voters.

The *New York Times* published an article in November 1918 headlined “Pershing for President in 1920.” Though his candidacy was uncertain, the article crystalized the public’s assumption that he’d run for president.

This would change months later.

("Come Back, General Pershing, We'll Make You President": Song Written by lyricist 'Dr. Smiles' encouraging Pershing to run for President. The lyrics note that Washington and Grant made great presidents after they returned home from war, and that Pershing would, too, if only he would run.")

As the 1920s seemed bound for difficult, complex issues, the nation grew more interested in voting for a qualified candidate rather than handing Pershing the position as a token of military appreciation.

Historian Richard Faulkner examined thousands of soldiers’ letters from the First World War, noting that a vast majority of the lasting impressions Pershing made on his troops happened during demobilization rather than the war itself. As the troops waited for months to be shipped home, Pershing ordered them to proceed with drill and training as if there was still a war to be fought. Soldiers resented this.

Charles Phelps Cushing, a Marine Corps veteran at the time and the co-founder of the American Expeditionary Force’s official news organization in France, wrote an opinion piece describing the feelings of US soldiers for their Pershing. He found that troops lacked affection for their commander due to his actions and approach.

Pershing was the epitome of his generation’s idea of a military man. His army was organized to function as a well-oiled machine, but to his troops he seemed cold and distant. While soldiers displayed “modern efficiency,” Pershing “chopped the heads of hundreds of the in-efficient.”

“As a candidate, one of [Pershing’s] more arduous tasks would be to overcome the antipathy of over two million overseas veterans who had become voters,” a Lawrence Leo Murray was quoted as saying. Unfortunately for Pershing, it was a battle he was not positioned to win.

According to Cushing, servicemen returned home with no intent to vote for Pershing nor any military officer in the election, including Pershing’s rival, Gen. Leonard Wood. While most war veterans had no interest in voting either man into office, between the two, Wood was the preferred candidate. Wood had been denied a major command in World War I, but he was still regarded as a hero for his role in the Spanish-American War and was a much stronger contender at the 1920 Republican National Convention than Pershing.



("Sharpen Your Own Axe!" Political cartoon depicting a U.S. veteran rejecting the advances of 'selfish-interests' to sway his vote.

Illustration by W.C. Morris.")

Pershing's bad reputation was not the only factor playing against him in the election.

As part of his campaign plan, Pershing intended to distance himself from politics and deny his status as a definite candidate. Because he knew he wouldn't enter the convention with majority support, he planned to present himself as a "dark horse," a compromise candidate. This entailed staying out of the official convention until the last second where he'd be portrayed as the reluctant but willing candidate to fulfill the nation's needs.



The focus of Pershing's strategy was his adopted home state, Nebraska. (Pershing lived in Lincoln in the 1890s.) The campaign's success depended on the state's voters to deliver a win in the primaries so that Pershing would enter the convention with at least some pledged delegates. (Most states did not have primaries at this time.) Assuming Nebraskans would patriotically vote for Pershing, he stood a chance at what was expected to be a deeply divided convention. But without Nebraska's votes, his run for office would be over.

(Pictured Right: History Nebraska 7104-388-(29))

By the time Pershing officially began his campaign efforts, however, it was too late. Wood gained the loyalty of most of the state's Republican Party Leadership.

Pershing's poor performance was due to several factors. He began his campaign late after a long period of acting like he wasn't interested. The combination of his unpopularity among troops, lack of personal appeal, and his bad political organization ultimately guaranteed his loss.

The entire article can be found in the Summer 2021 edition of the Nebraska History Magazine. Members receive four issues per year.

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Missteps by an Episcopal Priest that Led to Segregation

By Breanna Fanta, Editorial Assistant

It's 1868 in Nebraska City. The Civil War is over and the town is now home to a community of African Americans recently freed from Southern slavery. Few know how to read. A White Episcopal priest and a Black Protestant preacher establish St. Augustine's, a place of both worship and education for local Black residents. The goal is to advance equality, but instead the project establishes racial segregation in local schools. Historian Jo Wetherilt Behrens tells the story in "The Troubled Road to Equality for African Americans in Nebraska City, Nebraska: Missteps by an Episcopal Priest that led to Segregation, 1868 – 1893," in *Nebraska History Magazine's* Summer 2021 issue.

Reverend William Henry Wilson and Reverend Robert W. Oliver both arrived in Nebraska City around 1868. Wilson had been born into slavery in Virginia, and later worked as a barber and unordained preacher to local African American Methodists. Oliver was an ex-British Army officer who served as Dean of the Divinity Department at the Episcopal Church's college in Nebraska City. While living in Pennsylvania before the Civil War, Oliver had been an abolitionist and was active in the Underground Railroad.

In Nebraska City, Oliver organized a day school for the Black community. It held classes from the late 1860s to the early 1870s. Students were taught from the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer because he "thought it better to educate them up to the standard of the church, than to bring the church down to theirs."

The Nebraska City School Board addressed the inadequacies of the education the day school was providing. The board opened a formal teaching position and the school raised money for new materials.

In the summer of 1870, the chapel of St. Augustine's was erected under the direction of Preacher Wilson and the support of Reverend Oliver as a separate space for African Americans to practice their religious freedoms. Years afterward it was converted to serve as both a chapel and schoolhouse for the Black community.



In 1879, the school board deliberated whether to keep St. Augustine's doors open. If they closed the school, Black students would be integrated into existing public schools. If the separation of facilities remained, a new building would need to be constructed, but the board wondered whether the local African American population was large enough to "warrant the expense."

Reverend Oliver, both an abolitionist and a segregationist, did not believe integrating schools was a good decision. His grandson years later noted: "He wanted the negro to have every advantage that freedom affords ..." but also believed that separate schools with Black teachers was best.

Oliver volunteered to keep the school open without city funding, but the school board decided to integrate.

That fall, Black students were hesitant to enroll in school out of fear of animosity from their White peers, but they gradually returned.

(Above: "St. Augustine Episcopal Church, an African American church in Nebraska City, illustration from *The Guardian* (published by the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska), May 1, 1874.")

The following summer Oliver vowed to end school integration. He petitioned the school board to provide a separate school for Black students. He offered for St. Augustine's to be again "at the disposal of the school board free of all demands."

A rumor circulated that the board was willing to dedicate a single classroom for solely Black students, but Oliver refused. He wanted Black students to have the same academic experiences as the White students, but separately and without fear of being taunted.

Nebraska City schools remained integrated for another three years.

During this time, the collaboration between the Episcopal church and the Black community was altered. Behrens suggests that the "growing tension over integration may have played a role in Rev. William Henry Wilson's decision to leave Nebraska in November 1877." The function of the St. Augustine building shifted from education to serving and supporting impoverished African Americans.

During the summer of 1882—the same year a Black student was valedictorian of the public school graduating class—the segregation issue reemerged. Black parents were divided in their opinions. Some opposed segregation and believed it resulted in an inadequate education; others strongly believed the opposite. Either way, Black parents wanted the same security, privileges and rights for their children as provided in the existing public schools.

Ultimately, the school board's main concern was economics.

Oliver, persistent that "separation" could mean "equality," approached the board with the same offers as before. This time they accepted.

St. Augustine was used as a separate school for another decade of segregated schools. During that period, the building became severely dilapidated. "Forcing Black children to learn in a decrepit building was its own kind of racism," Behrens writes.

Finally in 1893, the school board closed St. Augustine, which by then had only 12 students attending.

Long gone, the St. Augustine school remains a cautionary tale. Robert W. Oliver's efforts provided some service to the Black community, but they were ultimately missteps. He acknowledged the need for education, but failed in recognizing how to achieve equality. In an academic setting, equality could not be taught in separation but had to be learned side-by-side.



(Left: "Rev. Dr. [Robert] William Oliver came to Nebraska City in 1868 to serve as head of the Divinity Department at Nebraska College.")

The entire article can be found in the Summer 2021 edition of the Nebraska History Magazine. Members receive four issues per year.

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Nebraska Spirit Day

When:

Saturday, November 13, 2021 - 10:00am to 2:00pm

Where:

Nebraska History Museum

Nebraska Spirit Day is a family event with all ages are welcome and no registration required. Just show up! It will be held at the Nebraska History Museum (131 Centennial Mall N) on November 13th, 2021 from 10:00am to 2:00pm.

The event celebrates the state of Nebraska and will have several activities including: Design a new Nebraska flag, take a "shoe selfie" on our Nebraska map, and go on a riddle scavenger hunt in our Unwrapped exhibit.

We hope to see you there!